
Simpson Park

55-85 SW 17 Road

Designation Report



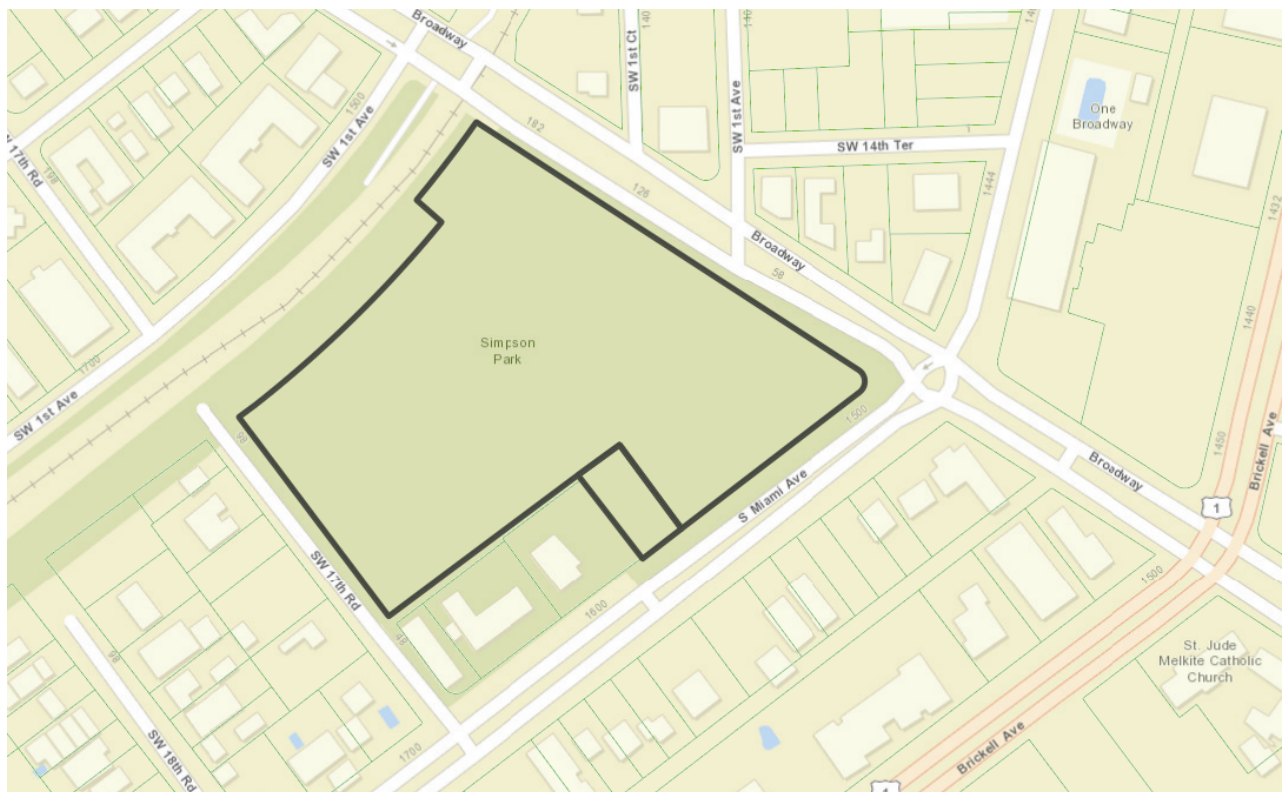
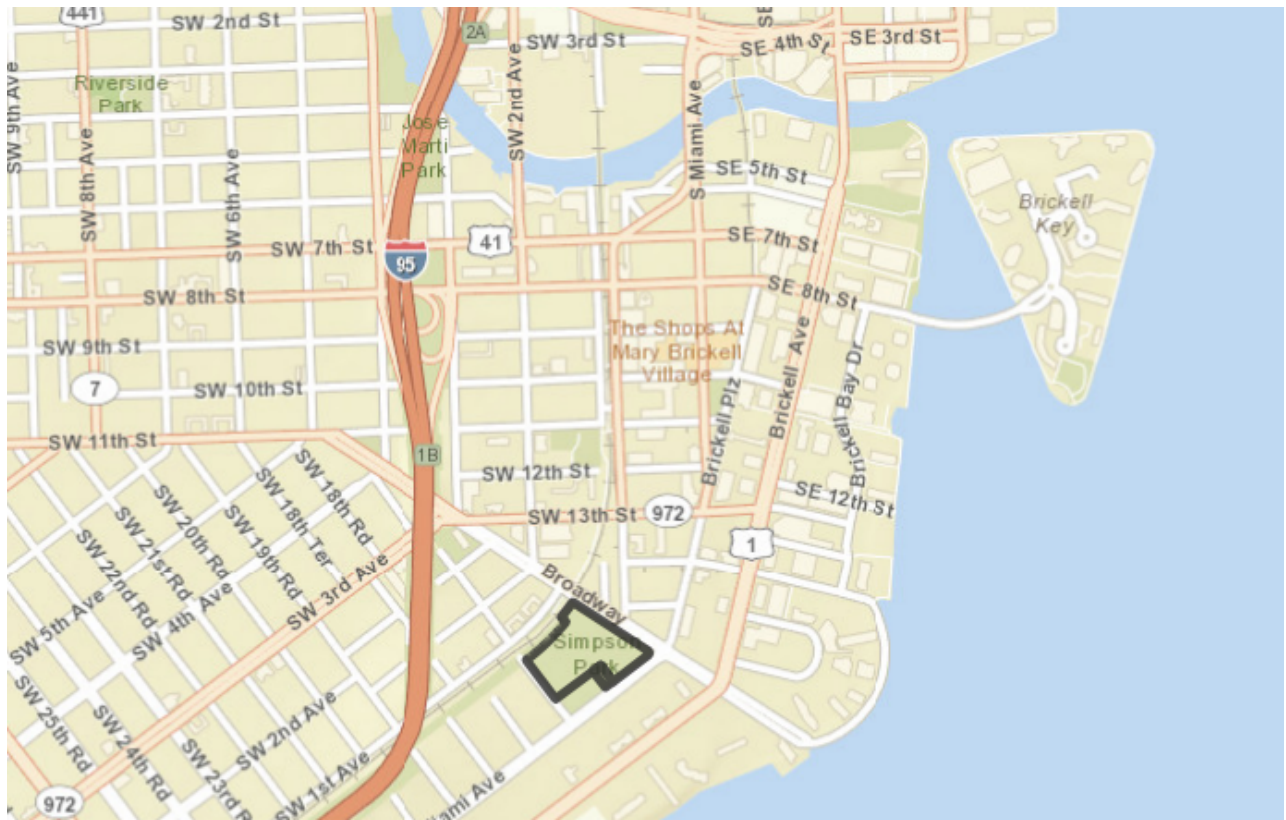
Historic and Environmental Preservation Board



City of Miami

REPORT OF THE CITY OF MIAMI
PRESERVATION OFFICER
TO THE HISTORIC AND ENVIRONMENTAL PRESERVATION BOARD
ON THE DESIGNATION OF
SIMPSON PARK
AS A HISTORIC SITE

Written by Megan McLaughlin
Date June 2, 2014



I. General Information

Historic Name:

Jungle Park: 1914-1931

Simpson Park: 1931-present

Also appears on maps as "City Park" in 1919 and "Flagler Park" in 1925

Current Name: Simpson Park

Period of Significance: 1914-1960

Location: 55-85 Southwest 17 Road, Miami, FL

Present Owner: City of Miami

Present use: City Park / Nature Preserve / Community Center

Zoning: T1: Natural Transect Zone

Folio No.: 0141390590020 and 0141390110010

Boundary (Legal Description):

- SIMPSON PARK FIRST ADDITION PB 149-32 T-19500 LOT 2 BLK 1
- SIMPSON PARK PB 82-70 TR A LESS COMM MOST SLY COR TR A PER PB 82-70 NE 351.6FT TO POB CONT NE 50FT SE150FT SW25FT SWLY WLY NWLY A/D 39.27FT NW125FT TO POB

Setting: Dense urban area; multifamily residential to the north and large single family homes to the south. Metrorail right-of-way runs along the northwestern boundary

Integrity: Good – park retains its character as a native forest representing the original Brickell Hammock habitat. Perimeter oolitic limestone wall and garden center retain their original design, with some alterations and additions

Classification: Historic Site

II. Significance

Brickell Hammock

Simpson Park is a natural preserve that encompasses over eight acres of tropical hardwood hammock in the center of Miami's urban core, one of the last remnants of the famous Brickell Hammock. The term hammock is used in the southeastern United States to refer to a stand of trees that form an ecological island within a contrasting ecosystem.¹ In South Florida, there are two types of hammocks: low hammock and high hammock. Low hammock is a stand of hardwood trees located within a wetlands, for instance in the Everglades. High Hammock is a stand of hardwood trees and associated understory plants located along a porous limestone ridge, usually an "island" within a pineland.² The Brickell Hammock was a High Hammock, an extensive sub-tropical "jungle" that grew along the elevated bluff that extended along Biscayne Bay from Downtown Miami south to Coconut Grove and Cutler. This elevated bluff was formed by marine life and was the oldest land in southeast Florida. It was forested by seeds brought in by high tides over the land, and there were more varieties of trees found here than in any other section of the state.

In a 1941 article highlighting Simpson Park, the Miami Daily News reported that

*According to Dr. Karl Dahlberg, who as city horticulturist and in charge of the city nursery, did much of the work of creating this park, What is now Simpson Park, was 50 years ago the heart of the wonderful Brickell hammock, extending along Biscayne bay from the Miami river to Coconut Grove with an Indian trail running through it parallel with the shore. One hundred years ago the hammock was larger, extending to Cutler. The hammock and the now vanished custard-apple forest in Florida were described by the botanist as the eighth and ninth wonders of the world. For Brickell hammock was the world's northernmost tropical climate forest – where the tropical growth ends and temperate zone plants begin and to some extent mingle. The hammock's species are all West Indian except the live-oak, mulberry, hackleberry, red-bay and sweet-bay which here mingle with the West Indies flora.*³

It has been cited that Simpson Park possesses the most diverse forest community with the highest number of unique species for proportionate space as is found anywhere in the United States.⁴ Because of its biodiversity, Simpson Park possesses great genetic value to the South Florida Ecosystem, and is a valuable laboratory for research worldwide.

Unique Effort to Preserve Hammock

The creation of Simpson Park, originally named "Jungle Park," was an early, proactive attempt to preserve Miami's natural features for public education and enjoyment. In 1914, by resolution of the Miami City Council, the City of Miami purchased 4.4 acres of hardwood hammock from Mary Brickell for use as a public park. The land was located at the intersection of South Miami Avenue and Broadway (SW 15th Road) and cost a total of \$12,500, which was paid in ten installments over ten years.⁵ This was a unique example of preservation in the early years of the Magic City, which was otherwise noteworthy for its incredible transformation from wilderness

¹ [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hammock_\(ecology\)](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hammock_(ecology)) Wikipedia. Retrieved 4 June 2014.

² Lane, Marilyn. "What's Left of Our Hammocks As Civilization Swings On," *The Miami News*, April 18, 1965.

³ "Garden Clubs Open Center in Park Soon" *The Miami Daily News*, October 26, 1941.

⁴ Thompson, Lawrence. "Simpson Park: Paradise or Nuisance?," *The Miami Herald*, April 24, 1958.

⁵ Articles of Agreement between Mary Brickell and the City of Miami, September 2, 1914. [The original signed agreement is in the possession of the City of Miami Department of Asset Management, Miami, Florida]

to urbanity, seemingly overnight. The loss of most of the Brickell Hammock was a cause for lament from some. As early as 1923, The Miami Daily Metropolis reported that,

*Regret has been stated by some people, who have felt the significance of Jungle Park, that the city did not seize the opportunity to take a good share of Brickell hammock and develop it in the same way before it was subdivided, for although it seemed valuable land for a park, it has been pointed out that it would cost the city no more, proportionately, than Central Park costs New York City, and it would be so unique that it would draw many tourists.*⁶

In 1931, The Miami News published an editorial stating that the Brickell hammock running from the Miami River to Viscaya should be “saved if possible and kept for use as small park areas... one of the things that is making Chicago such a marvelous city is the fact that the county and city have cooperated to preserve vast stretches of natural woodland extending around three sides of the city.”⁷

Despite early recognition of the unique environmental value of the Brickell Hammock, it was almost entirely destroyed. The only remnants of the original hammock that exist in the City of Miami today are preserved at Simpson Park, Alice Wainwright Park, Vizcaya, and The Barnacle. Preserved pieces of hammock elsewhere in Dade County include The Charles Deering Estate, Matheson Hammock Park, R. Hardy Matheson Preserve, and Castellow Hammock Park.

Charles Torrey Simpson

Simpson Park is significant as one of the only tangible legacies of the beloved scientist, explorer, environmentalist, and author Charles Torrey Simpson. Simpson was one of South Florida’s first conservationists, pre-dating more well known South Florida botanists such as David Fairchild and Charles Montgomery. Simpson was a self-taught field naturalist who built his career on the study of shells. Although Simpson never attended university, his passion for collecting and studying shells landed him a job as a curator in the Department of Mollusks at the Smithsonian Institute in Washington, D.C. During his thirteen-year career at the Smithsonian, Simpson published dozens of articles in academic journals, lectured at Georgetown University, and produced research that resulted in a 500-page report on fresh water bivalves, which Simpson described as “the first scientific classification of its kind ever made in this country.”⁸

Although he lived the first half of his life in Illinois and Washington, D.C., Simpson had a naturalist’s passion for Florida and the tropics, due to the unique animal and plant life found there. In 1902, Simpson retired to Lemon City, settling on a large bayfront estate called The Sentinels and building a wooden vernacular home that responded to the South Florida climate. His estate consisted of over 600 feet of waterfront, pineland, mangroves, and an area of hammock.

During his tenure in South Florida, Simpson wrote four books about South Florida nature: *Ornamental Gardening in Florida* (1916), *In Lower Florida Wilds* (1920), *Out of Doors in Florida*

⁶ “Beautifying the Magic City: Jungle Park Might Be One of Miami’s Greatest Attractions – Many Problems to Be Faced,” The Miami Daily Metropolis, February 17, 1923.

⁷ Halliwell, Ashleigh C. “Brickell Hammock,” The Miami News, April 1, 1931.

⁸ La Plante, Leah. “The Sage of Biscayne Bay: Charles Torrey Simpson’s Love Affair with South Florida,” Tequesta: The Journal of the Historical Association of Southern Florida. Volume 1, number 55, 1995.

(1924), and *Florida Wild Life* (1932), as well as numerous articles in magazines and newspapers. Simpson wrote extensively about the hammock on his property, and he gave frequent tours to visitors, working to educate the public on the beauty and value of South Florida's unique and rapidly disappearing habitat. In his book *Ornamental Gardening in Florida*, Simpson wrote,

*I want to lift up my voice and plead for the hammocks. Like the wild game they are disappearing fast before the destroyer, man. It is only a question of time, and little time at that, when, at the rate they are being wiped out now the last of them will be gone. Along the shores of Biscayne Bay and on the nearby keys there are over one hundred species of tropical trees which are found growing wild nowhere else in the United States. It seems to me that it is almost a crime to exterminate these rare and beautiful things. Just within the boundaries of Miami and to the south of it there was, probably, the finest body of tropical hammock within the state and it ought to have been preserved for a park and arboretum but it is rapidly being destroyed and turned into building lots. If you have a bit of hammock on your premises save it; if you have already cut it down it may be that it would grow up again if it was not disturbed. Don't thin out the trees or in any way trim it up, for nature has made it more interesting and beautiful than it is possible for you to do.*⁹

Through his books, his friendships, and his actions, Simpson was a vocal proponent of conservation of natural areas throughout South Florida. The intense rate of "progress" in South Florida caused him to become quite pessimistic at times, prompting statements such as "Mankind everywhere has an insane desire to waste and destroy the good and beautiful things this nature has lavished upon him."¹⁰

In the late 1920s, Simpson was drawn to the cause of Jungle Park, as it was then known. Jungle Park was severely damaged by the Great Hurricane of 1926. Many native trees were broken and plants destroyed by the high winds. In the aftermath of the storm, the Park was used as a dumping ground for debris, and was further damaged by fire when the debris was burned. The sad state of this already precious bit of preserved hammock prompted Simpson to action. Working with the City of Miami horticulturist Dr. Karl Dahlberg, the Miami Garden Clubs, and other local botanists, Simpson worked to restore the hammock, not only to its pre-hurricane condition, but to its original state before undergrowth was cleared and exotic species were introduced. In a letter written in 1928 to a Mrs. Kent, Simpson writes,

*I enjoyed my trip to the Park very much and was greatly pleased to find the vegetation in such good shape. Although many of the live oaks and other trees are somewhat broken yet the most of them will come on and in a few years the average person will never suspect how much havoc was wrought by the dreadful storm of 1926 [sic]... But O, the awful wreck made by the fire! I haven't visited the Park since it happened and I was shocked over it. Many years will pass before the new growth will come on enough to make any cover. It was in this devastated area that the largest and finest of the live oaks grew and they were draped with what Dr. Small says is a different long moss from the common one here.*¹¹

⁹ Simpson, Charles Torrey. *Ornamental Gardening in Florida*, Published by the Author, Little River, Florida, 1916.

¹⁰ Ibid

¹¹ Simpson, Charles Torrey. Letter to Mrs. Kent, 27 November 1928. [The original handwritten letter is in the HistoryMiami archives, Miami, Florida.]

In 1931, in recognition of Simpson's efforts, the City of Miami dedicated and renamed Jungle Park as Simpson Park in an official ceremony, attended by Mr. and Mrs. Simpson, Mrs. T. V. Moore, Mayor C.H. Reeder, Dr. David Fairchild, Mrs. M.G. Holleman, and Dr. Howard Kelly. At the ceremony, Simpson was modest, stating, "I am thankful to all of you for what you have done for me but far more important to me than the honor you have done me is the fact that you are preserving the beauties of this park."¹² Simpson was an understated man who seemed embarrassed by public recognition, and in a letter dated March 29, 1931, he had written, "I hope I shall se [sic] you on that dreadful day when they dedicate the park. If I could look at you once in awhile while I attempt to talk I am sure it would brace me up."¹³

Charles Torrey Simpson passed away on December 17, 1932. His estate on Biscayne Bay was eventually sold and developed as Palm Bay Towers. As a result, the house was demolished and the majority of Simpson's beloved landscape was destroyed. A small portion of the property is designated by the City of Miami as Environmental Preservation District 5, but it is unclear as to how much original habitat remains within this district, as much of it was cleared to make way for the entrance to Palm Bay Towers. Although his estate has been lost, Simpson's legacy lives on in Simpson Park and in his body of work.

Garden Club Movement

The Miami Garden Club was established in 1922, following the rise of the Garden Club movement across the United States. Garden Clubs were an extension of the 19th-century Women's Club movement, which provided a public role for middle and upper-class women who were otherwise relegated to the domestic sphere.¹⁴ Garden Clubs cropped up in the 1920s in response to the new style of "Garden City" suburban development that provided the middle class a vast canvas for landscaping that previously was only available to wealthy owners of large estates. Women became involved in the design and care of their own gardens around their single-family suburban homes; they rallied together for the civic beautification and landscaping of the newly constructed motorways.¹⁵

The original board members of the Miami Garden Club included prominent community members Mrs. James M. Jackson, Mrs. John Sewell, Mrs. Marjory Stoneman Douglas and Mrs. Carl Fisher.¹⁶ The group developed a strong mission after the great hurricane of 1926, when nearly all plantings in Miami were destroyed. They came to understand that the soil and climate conditions in South Florida were unique within the entire United States, and that Miami's population of northern transplants had no knowledge or understanding of what to plant and how to care for it when it was planted.¹⁷ Therefore, the Garden Clubs became an important source of information for homeowners as well as those who sought to landscape public spaces. The Miami Garden Club worked with Charles Torrey Simpson and other local botanists to restore Miami's parks in the wake of the hurricane, in particular "Jungle Park" as it was then known.

¹² "Miami's Jungle Park Dedicated by Noted Group," Miami Daily News, 1931.

¹³ Simpson, Charles Torrey. Letter to 'My dear friends', 29 March 1931. [A scanned copy of the original handwritten letter is in the possession of the City of Miami Preservation Office, Miami, Florida.]

¹⁴ Blair, Karen J., "Women's Club Movement", in Paul S. Boyer, Melvyn Dubofsky, The Oxford Companion to United States History, Oxford University Press, 2001. p835

¹⁵ Birnbaum, Charles A. and Mary V. Hughes, Design with culture: claiming America's landscape heritage, University of Virginia Press, 2005. p. 27

¹⁶ Corley, Pauline. "Garden Center for Miami Is Chief Aim of Women Active in Promotion of Horticulture In This Area," The Miami Herald, July 1937.

¹⁷ Corley.

In the 1930s, the Miami Garden Club embarked on a mission to construct a building that would serve both as a garden center and as a memorial to the late Dr. Charles Torrey Simpson, with whom they had worked with generally in the dissemination of information on suitable ornamental landscaping in South Florida, and specifically in the restoration of Jungle Park. When describing the intent of the garden center building they explained, "In its ideal form it would consist of a suitable building in an accessible location, with a trained horticulturist in charge and a well-equipped reference library."¹⁸ The building was also intended as meeting space for garden clubs and groups interested in horticulture.

The construction of the garden center and the accompanying expansion of Simpson Park was a joint effort of the Miami Garden Club and the City of Miami. In 1941, a Miami Daily News article described the efforts of the women of the Miami Garden Club, stating that the group had overseen the fundraising and construction of the garden center for over 10 years, creating a Simpson Memorial association fund. Hand-in-hand with the effort to construct the garden center, Simpson Park was expanded. The Garden Club convinced the Miami Division of Parks to purchase 16 undeveloped lots adjacent to Simpson Park, and to expand the park to include this bit of untouched hammock. The City purchased the land in 1940 from Mary Grossman for a sum of \$13,300.¹⁹ The Garden Club and the City divided the costs of construction of the garden center, with the Garden Club paying for materials and labor and the City paying for construction and architectural plans.²⁰

The garden center was seen as a way of inviting the public into the park; previously the park was not very well known and was subject to much vandalism. The Miami Daily News noted that, "the walls that surround Simpson park... [join] the front walls of the house, giving the structure the appearance of a lodge entrance to an estate." The building was constructed close to 17th Road in order to reduce impacts to the park and to serve as a gateway building into the nature preserve. As intended, the building was purpose built as a meeting space, with a large open room in the middle, large French double doors on the side that opened to a terrace for overflow for meetings, and a deep porch at the rear that opened up completely with sliding doors to provide for additional overflow and access to the park. A small library was located off of the main meeting room and bathrooms were included. A kitchen addition was constructed in 1957. At the dedication ceremony for the building in 1941, the late Dr. Charles Torrey Simpson was yet again praised for "helping save Simpson park."²¹

Ongoing Threats

Simpson Park is significant as a literal and figurative battleground for the preservation of park space in the face of intense development pressure and other environmental threats. The story of Simpson Park's unlikely and fortuitous survival for over 100 years is relevant to parks throughout Miami-Dade County today.

Trespassing and Maintenance

¹⁸ Corley.

¹⁹ Warranty Deed from Mary Grossman, Trustee, to City of Miami, July 16, 1940. (Recorded July 19, 1940), Dade County, Florida, Deed Book 2080, page 276. [The original signed deed is in the possession of the City of Miami Department of Asset Management, Miami, Florida]

²⁰ Smith, Elinor Cecil. "Miami Area Garden Devotees Hail Projected Center in Simpson Park: Area Once Part Of Famous Brickell Hammock; Botanist Termed It World's Eighth Wonder," The Miami News, October 26, 1941.

²¹ "Group Praises Rescue Of Park," The Miami News, November 9, 1941.

Trespassers have been an on-going challenge to Simpson Park from its very inception, as an urban forest provides the perfect environment for hiding and doing illicit activity. Even today access to the park must be carefully managed. A 1923 Miami Herald article references vandalism, stating that the park keeper cannot place orchids and air plants in the trees for fear of thieves, and that one tree was dead after a trespasser set a fire inside.²² In 1952, only eleven years after the expansion of the park and the construction of the garden center, the Miami Daily News published an article about safety concerns in the park, including vagrants occupying the park at night and an increase in burglaries around the park.²³ In 1958, the park is described as a “hobo jungle”²⁴ and that police cite problems with with perverts and tramps.²⁵ The Miami Herald blamed the state of the park on lack of maintenance: “Year after year the City of Miami has refused to provide funds to maintain the park.... Overturned benches, broken bottles, and molding debris greet the visitor.”²⁶ In the 1990s, neighbors around the park raised money to reinforce the perimeter fence to reduce trespassing and related crimes.²⁷

History Museum

On May 17, 1958, perhaps in frustration with increasing crime and the deteriorated state of the park, the Miami City Commission voted to give half of the park, the original four acres purchased from Mary Brickell, to the Historical Association of Southern Florida (HASF) for the construction of a History Museum. HASF officials stated that, “As it is now, Simpson Park is almost an impenetrable jungle. The general public can’t enjoy it, and it has become a gathering place for perverts and tramps. Sooner or later it would become such a problem the city would be forced to do something about it. Under our proposal, much of the park will be preserved in its original state, but people will be able to see and enjoy it.”²⁸ Perhaps surprisingly, the President of the Miami Council of Garden Clubs supported the effort to develop half of the park, stating, “ordinarily we are on record as opposing the destruction of trees, but the park is impossible the way it is now. It needs some grooming and some way to keep out the vagrants.”²⁹ Charles Torrey Simpson’s own stepdaughter, Miss Marion Allison Roper, was accused of supporting the plan, but she defended herself, stating, “I did say that I’d rather see part of the park used to build a history museum than to see the entire park destroyed to put up commercial buildings.”³⁰

Despite initial support for the plan, intense public outcry resulted from this threat. Well-recognized public figures spoke out, including Marjorie Stoneman Douglas³¹, Philip Wylie, and Rose Kennedy. Philip Wylie, a nationally-known author, stated that, “In the near-thirty years I’ve been here, I’ve watched seemingly rational business men bulldoze out of existence some of the most fabulous history we have here: Natural History. The Brickell Hammock, for instance, has been shrunk by heavy machinery and avarice to the tiny sample of what it used to be: Simpson Park.”³² Rose Kennedy wrote a letter to the editor stating that, “It is little short of robbery of the

²² “Beautifying the Magic City”

²³ “Simpson” Miami Daily News, Dec 6, 1952.

²⁴ Smiley, Nixon. “Simpson Park Condemned Without Benefit of Counsel,” The Miami Herald April 20, 1958.

²⁵ Thompson, Lawrence. “Simpson Park: Paradise or Nuisance?,” The Miami Herald, April 24, 1958.

²⁶ Smiley, “Simpson Park Condemned Without Benefit of Counsel”

²⁷ City of Miami Simpson Park: Your downtown environmental park Parks and Recreation Department brochure c. 2010.

²⁸ Thompson, Lawrence. “Simpson Park Not Doomed,” The Miami Herald, March 21, 1958.

²⁹ Jones, Charles. “Miami’s ‘Jungle’ Park Safe Against Razing,” The Miami News, April 7, 1958.

³⁰ Smiley, Nixon. “Miss Roper ‘Didn’t OK Museum’,” The Miami Herald May 4, 1958.

³¹ Smiley, “Miss Roper ‘Didn’t OK Museum’

³² “Wylie Rips Simpson Park ‘Grab’,” The Miami Herald, April 23, 1958.

public domain to lease this land or any other that encroaches into our impoverished park system... the choice of Simpson Memorial Garden Center... seems particularly unwise. There it sits, in original wilderness, the only city park in all Miami in which the past is the more treasured because progress threatens to engulf it... Unless this giveaway is stopped and our park system held inviolate, our city will become a disgrace to itself and to the entire nation. To allow encroachment on this pitifully small remnant of a Miami we shall never see again seems like a sanctioned act of vandalism.”³³ Joining in the outcry, and in contrast to the previous public statements made by Miami’s women gardeners, the Men’s Garden Club publicly stated that it “bitterly opposed to any destruction of the only natural hammock that the City of Miami has in its parks division.”³⁴ As a result of the public protest, Simpson Park was saved, and the History Museum was built elsewhere.

Infrastructure expansion

Simpson Park is located adjacent to the old Florida East Coast Railway right-of-way, one of the only available infrastructure corridors through eastern Miami’s dense urban development. As a result, the park is continuously threatened by large-scale infrastructure proposals. In 1960, just two years after the History Museum controversy, the State Road Department proposed cutting a 225-foot swath through Simpson Park for construction of a “North-South Expressway,” later known as I-95. Charles H. Crandon, former county commission chairman and father of the Dade park system, and Metro Commissioner Charles F. Hall, joined together to create a “Committee to Defend the Parks” to fight this and other threats to public parks in Dade County.³⁵ In addition, representatives of nearly 70 garden clubs circulated petitions opposing the route of the North-South Expressway.³⁶ In the end, the route was adjusted westward and has had no impact on Simpson Park. In the 1970s, the construction of the elevated Metrorail system threatened the park, and now the park may be threatened again by the construction of high-voltage powerlines for Florida Power and Light.

³³ Kennedy, Rose. “Leasing of Simpson Park is ‘Sanctioned Vandalism’,” *The Miami News*, March 27, 1958.

³⁴ Smiley, Nixon. “Men Join Fight To Save Park,” *The Miami Herald*, June 2, 1958.

³⁵ Einstein, Paul. “Crandon, Hall Organize Park S.O.S. Committee,” *The Miami Daily News*, August 28, 1960.

³⁶ Blanchard, Louise. “Garden Clubs Fighting For Simpson Park,” *The Miami News*, August 2, 1960.

Application of Criteria for Designation:

Simpson Park has significance in the historic and architectural heritage of Miami, possesses integrity of design, setting, materials, workmanship, feeling and association; and is eligible for designation under the following criteria, as numbered in Section 23-4(a):

1. Simpson Park is associated in a significant way with the life of a person important in the past.

Charles Torrey Simpson was a well-loved author, botanist, malacologist, and conservationist, who lived in South Florida from 1902 until his death in 1932. He built his own bay front home in the midst of a hardwood hammock in Lemon City, where he spent his days studying and experimenting with native South Florida plants, and writing articles and books on the subject of plants and conservation. He was fondly known amongst South Floridians as "The Sage of Biscayne Bay." Although he had no formal education, the University of Miami awarded him an honorary doctorate in 1927. Following the Great Hurricane of 1926, Simpson was a strong proponent of the restoration of "Jungle Park" which had been severely compromised since its creation in 1914. His efforts were recognized in 1931 when the park was renamed and dedicated in his honor. In 1941, a garden center and memorial building was constructed in an expanded portion of the park. The building was named The Charles Torrey Simpson Memorial Garden Center. Of Charles Torrey Simpson's significant contributions to the landscape of South Florida, only Simpson Park, the Charles Torrey Simpson Memorial Building, and a few trees from his nine-and-a-half acre homestead in Lemon City can still be visited today.

3. Simpson Park exemplifies the historical, cultural, political, economical, or social trends of the community.

The creation of and the continued existence of Simpson Park represents trends in preservation, conservation, restoration and exhibition of South Florida's flora and fauna for the purpose of public education and public benefit.

Conservation Effort

Simpson Park represents one of the first conservation efforts in Miami. The City of Miami's decision to purchase of 4.4 acres of pristine hardwood hammock from Mary Brickell in 1914 was an early and singular effort to preserve a portion of urban wilderness for public benefit. As a reflection of that idea of urban wilderness, from 1914-1931 the park was referred to as "Jungle Park." The park was originally intended as a preserved piece of hammock left in its natural state, with a simple trail running through it for public enjoyment. In the 1920s, the hammock was compromised by well-intentioned efforts to "spruce up the park," and later by the Great Hurricane of 1926, and the debris and fires that followed.

In the late 1920s and early 1930s local botanists and conservationists including Charles Torrey Simpson and Dr. Karl Dahlberg took renewed interest in the Park. They worked tirelessly to restore the hammock to its natural state after the hurricane, reintroducing native species of trees and undergrowth, and clearing out exotic plant species, debris and the effects of fire. They also called public attention to the significance of the rare habitat represented in the hammock. This was the first of repeated efforts to restore the park, illustrating a strong, if exclusive, conservation ethic in South Florida.

Garden Club Movement

The Charles Torrey Simpson Memorial Garden Center and the western half of Simpson Park are tangible reminders of the Garden Club movement in South Florida and its contributions to the regional landscape. Garden Clubs were a twentieth-century phenomenon and an outgrowth of the Women's Club movement, which provided a public voice for middle-class women who

were otherwise relegated to the private life of the home. In the 1920s, Garden Clubs began cropping up across the country as changing development patterns provided opportunity for increased ornamental plantings. Many of these Garden Clubs took on a high-profile mission of civic beautification, leading efforts to plant street trees along newly built highways, plant flowers in new civic spaces, and leading state-wide battles against roadside billboards.

The Miami Garden Club was organized in 1922 but truly developed a mission after the 1926 hurricane, which devastated most of the vegetation in the area. The women of the Garden Club, almost exclusively transplants from the North, worked together to research and disseminate information on what to plant and how to care for it in this singular South Florida climate. The Miami Garden Clubs were strong supporters of civic beautification and conservation, supporting preservation of natural areas as well as landscaping and improvements along roadways. The Miami Garden Club worked closely with Charles Torrey Simpson to restore "Jungle Park" in the late 1920s, and supported its dedication as Simpson Park in 1931. From 1931 to 1941, the Garden Club worked tirelessly to expand Simpson Park and construct a garden center and memorial building in the expanded park. They convinced the City of Miami to purchase an additional 4 acres of land to expand the park, and they raised the money for the construction of the garden center. Once opened, the garden center served as the meeting location for Garden Clubs throughout Miami, as well as a research center, with a well-stocked reference library on South Florida plants.

Preservation Activism

Throughout its one hundred year history, Simpson Park has been repeatedly threatened and has served as a figurative battleground for development interests versus conservationists. Threats over the years have included construction of a History Museum, construction of I-95, construction of the Metrorail, and most recently, construction of high-voltage power lines. In each instance, the potential threat has served as a rallying point for conservationists who have worked to promote public appreciation of the unique features of the park.

7. Simpson Park contains elements of design, detail, materials, or craftsmanship of outstanding quality or which represent a significant innovation or adaptation to the South Florida environment.

The built elements of Simpson Park, including the perimeter wall and the Charles Torrey Simpson Memorial Building, are comprised of oolitic limestone, a signature building material of South Florida. The garden center, or Memorial Building, is a vernacular example of civic buildings of the 1940s, employing domestic features on a public structure. The building is constructed with a covered front porch for the hot and rainy South Florida environment.

8. Simpson Park has yielded, or may be likely to yield, information important in prehistory or history.

Simpson Park is likely to yield information important in prehistory. The park is located within the original Brickell Hammock, an area known to have been settled by Native Americans, including the Tequesta people. Areas in the vicinity have yielded artifacts that suggest that Native American settlements and cemeteries could have been located in Simpson Park.

III. Description

Setting:

Simpson Park is located in Miami's urban core, at the meeting point of the Brickell financial district, the Brickell residential district, and the Roads residential neighborhood. The Park provides much needed green space for the hundreds of thousands of condominium residents and office workers in the area. The northeastern edge of the park is bounded by Broadway (SW 15th Road), an axial road that connects Coral Way to Brickell Avenue and Biscayne Bay. The southeastern edge of the park is bounded by South Miami Avenue, an iconic roadway that is defined by its signature Royal Poinciana trees and large homes in an urban context. South Miami Avenue is designated a historic roadway and a Scenic Transportation Corridor in the City of Miami. The southwestern edge of the park, and the main entrance to the park, is SW 17th Road, a small-scale, dead-end residential street. The northwestern edge of the park is the Metrorail right-of-way, defined by an elevated heavy rail structure, and open lawn beneath with a bicycle-pedestrian trail, known as the M-Path.

Native forest:

Simpson Park is defined by a native forest with minimal built intervention. The majority of the park is composed of native trees and undergrowth, with fallen trees, branches, and leaves left in place to naturally decompose. A simple narrow path winds through the forest, finished with crushed white shell and rock. Multiple generations of explanatory signage are placed throughout the park, dating from the 1940s to the present. The signs point out specific species of trees as well as interesting occurrences such as "Fallen Tree". Some benches are placed in clearings along the path. According to informational pamphlets produced by the City of Miami Department of Parks and Recreation, over 162 plant species are represented in Simpson Park. Of these, at least 96 are native species, such as Red Stopper, Spicewood, Marlberry, Satin Leaf, Pigeon Plum, White Stopper, Machineel, and Poisonwood, Lancewood, Live Oak, Strangler Fig, Jamaica Dogwood, Gumbo Limbo, False-Mastic, and Lignum Vitae. There are 15 endangered species and 9 threatened species in the park, including Wild Cinnamon, Coffee Columbrina, Yellow Boxwood, Silver Palm, Strongbark, Eugenia confuse, and Gulf licaria.

Perimeter wall:

The perimeter wall extends around all four sides of the Park, interrupted only by the Garden Center (the main entrance), the Eastern Entrance (currently closed), and a service entrance at the northwest, fronting the Metrorail right-of-way (currently closed). The perimeter wall was constructed in the 1930s-1940s and is constructed of native oolitic limestone. It is approximately three feet in height. Due to security concerns, a black painted chain link fence was added to the top of the wall along Broadway and South Miami Avenue. Along SW 17th Road and the Metrorail right-of-way a green metal picket fence was constructed on the outside of the oolitic rock wall to prevent trespassing.

Garden Center / Memorial Building:

The Charles Torrey Simpson Memorial Garden Center was constructed in 1941 and is constructed of native oolitic limestone. The original construction of the building was a simple rectangular plan, with an intermediate-slope, side-facing gable roof. The front façade facing the street is defined by a narrow porch supported by five square oolitic limestone columns. The main roof extends to cover the porch in an uninterrupted line. An asymmetrically-placed solid front door opens up onto the porch. An oolitic limestone chimney is placed at the center of the eastern gable end of the building. The windows are multi-pane, colonial style single-hung windows, the majority of which are hung in pairs. The building is designed as one large open space for meetings, with a small library and restrooms at one end of the building. The original

design of the building placed two pairs of French doors on either side of the chimney, to allow for overflow onto a terrace for large meetings. In addition, the northern side of the building fronting the park was designed as a series of doors that could open the space up completely to an open terrace and the park beyond. Over time, a series of additions and alterations have been made. A kitchen addition was placed at the rear of the building, and a wrap-around porch running along the eastern and northern sides of the building (fronting the park) was enclosed to provide additional interior space. A screen enclosure was later added to the back of the porch, creating two layers of gallery space around the original meeting room. When the porch was enclosed, the doors on the eastern and northern sides of the building were removed to allow free flow of space. The original windows and doors have been replaced and the roofing material has been changed. However, the original character of the building from the street remains the same, and all original oolitic limestone elements remain intact.

Pond:

A two-tiered pond is located in the northwestern corner of the park. The pond was excavated out of the limestone bedrock and finished with smooth concrete. The edge of the pond is finished with naturalistic limestone rock to appear as an integrated part of the park. Picnic tables and benches are placed in a clearing around the pond. The pond was constructed in the 1920s and was intended to be used as a place to display unique water plants and fish, however throughout its history it has repeatedly broken and lain empty due to lack of funds for repair. The pond is currently empty due to a broken water pump. The northwestern service entrance to the park is located adjacent to this pond.

Eastern Entrance:

The eastern entrance to the park fronts the traffic circle at the intersection of South Miami Avenue and Broadway. This is a relatively new entrance that was created to provide a more prominent and accessible entry to the park for the growing population center in Brickell. The entrance is comprised of a wood deck with embedded foot lights, rustic cut wood benches, and a modern-style lattice wood structure, built as a monolithic cube that creates an outdoor room while serving as a gateway into the park. A fine-grain chainmail curtain serves as a gate to secure the entrance. This entrance is currently closed due to the settling of the wood decking that has created a tripping hazard.

IV. Planning Context

Simpson Park is one of few public parks in the Brickell/Roads area, and it is one of the only remaining hammocks in the City of Miami. There is a high demand for park space in the area, particularly with new higher-density residential development under construction along South Miami Avenue to the north, and SW 1st Avenue across the street from the Metrorail line. It is important to educate the new residents and visitors on the environmental and historic significance of the park so that they respect the park as a nature preserve.

There has been discussion of opening all three park entrances during the day to allow greater access to the surrounding neighborhoods. Due to the history of vandalism and crime in the park, it is advisable that there be additional staff manning the entrances and patrolling the park if all three entrances will be opened. In addition, there is a need for a revolving maintenance fund to quickly address issues like the broken water pump in the pond and the uneven decking at the Eastern entrance. Lack of funding for repairs has resulted in the total loss of all fish and aquatic plants in the pond, and closure of the Eastern entrance for safety reasons.

Due to its location in the dense urban core of Miami and its adjacency to the high-pressure right-of-way of the former Florida East Coast Railway, Simpson Park is continually threatened by development, from institutional projects such as the History Museum to infrastructure projects such as I-95 and the Metrorail. Currently, the park is threatened by the planned construction of high-voltage power lines along the Metrorail corridor. These power lines would connect Florida Power and Light's planned expanded nuclear plants in South Dade to a sub-station on the Miami River in downtown Miami. The power lines are planned to be mounted on large poles that are approximately 100' in height. The "hum" of the high voltage power lines will have a negative impact on the park. The City of Miami has advocated that the power lines must be placed underground as they enter the Brickell area. The impact of the power lines on the health of the plants and animals in the park is unknown, whether pole-mounted or underground.

Simpson Park is part of an Archaeological Conservation Area in the City of Miami. All ground-disturbing activity within the park is subject to review by the Preservation Office and a Certificate to Dig is required. Although the current archaeological probability map, adopted in 2011, shows the Park as "moderate probability," the map should be updated to include the entire park as a high probability zone.

Simpson Park is designated a "Natural Forest Community" by Miami-Dade County, pursuant to Section 24-49 of the Miami-Dade County Code. In accordance with this County designation, removal of tree canopy or understory is generally prohibited and 90% or more of the protected hardwood hammock area must be preserved and maintained.

It is recommended that Simpson Park also be designated by the City of Miami as an Environmental Preservation District for its unique environmental features.

Preservation Objectives

The intent of this designation is to bring greater attention to the unique historic and environmental resources of Simpson Park, and to guide all future development decisions within and around the park. The park is continually threatened by environmental factors such as vandalism and crime, development pressures such as construction in and adjacent to the park, and lack of funding which results in inadequate maintenance of facilities.

V. Designation Elements

Boundaries:

The boundary of the designation is the property boundary for 55 SW 17th Road and 85 SW 17th Road as shown in this designation report, including the entirety of the perimeter oolitic limestone wall.

Major Features Subject to Review:

Architectural features subject to review include the perimeter wall, the pond, the path, and the exterior of the Garden Center, including all original oolitic limestone walls and features that have been enclosed from the porch additions. Modifications to the Eastern Entrance shall also be subject to review.

Any and all modifications to the landscape of the park, including new signage, tree plantings, trimming, and removals, new pathways, new construction, demolition, lighting, utility lines (above ground or underground), benches and other features, shall be subject to review by the Historic and Environmental Preservation Board.

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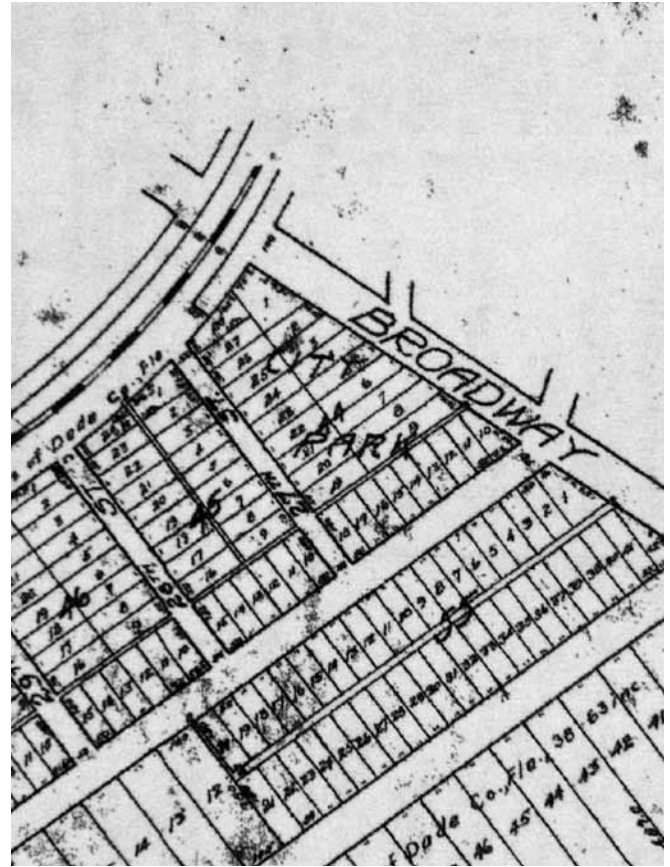
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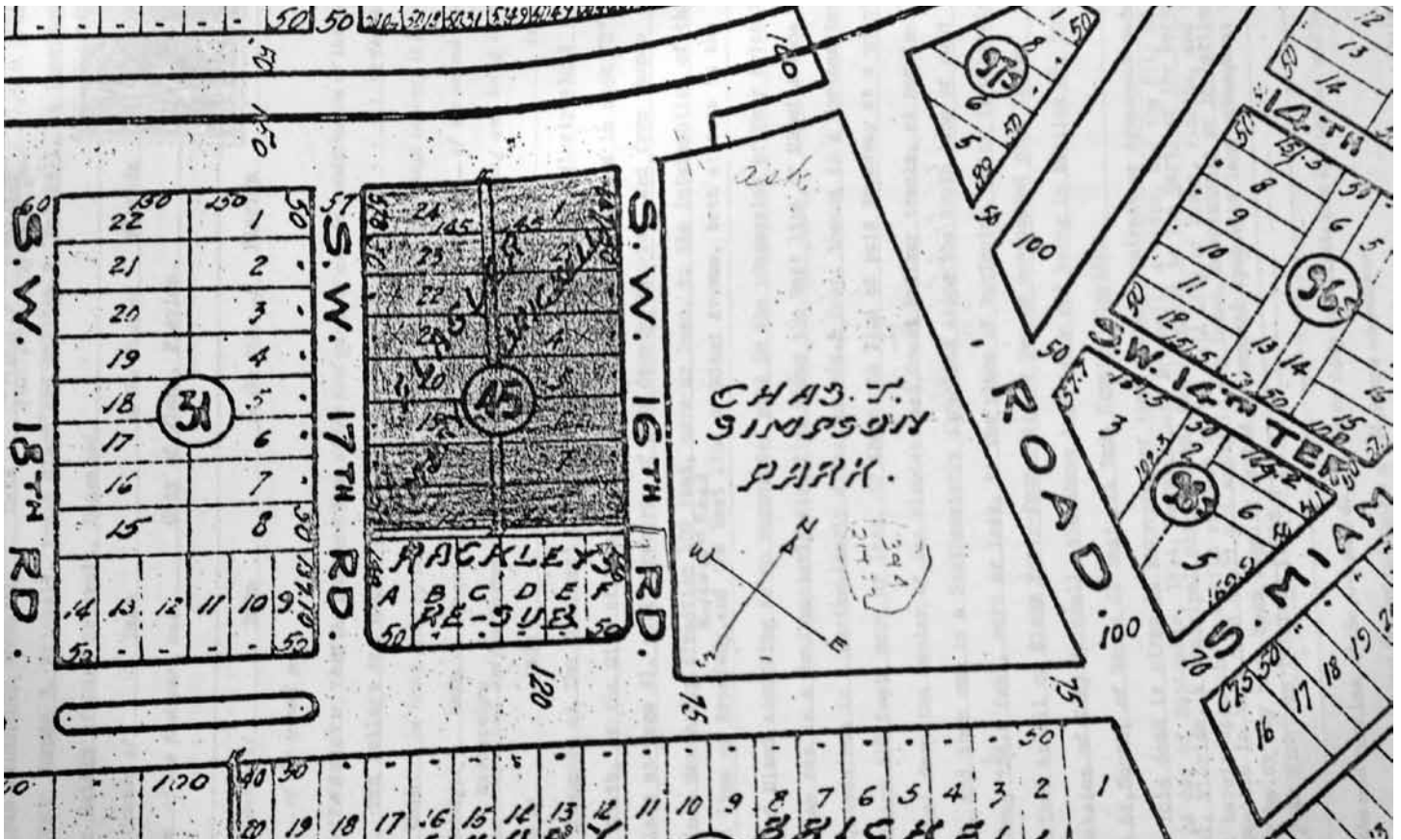
Trail running through Brickell hammock c. 1896
Image Source: J. N Chamberlain, photographer. HistoryMiami



Plat showing "City Park"; 1919
Image Source: City of Miami



Hopkins Map showing original boundaries of park; 1925
Image Source: City of Miami



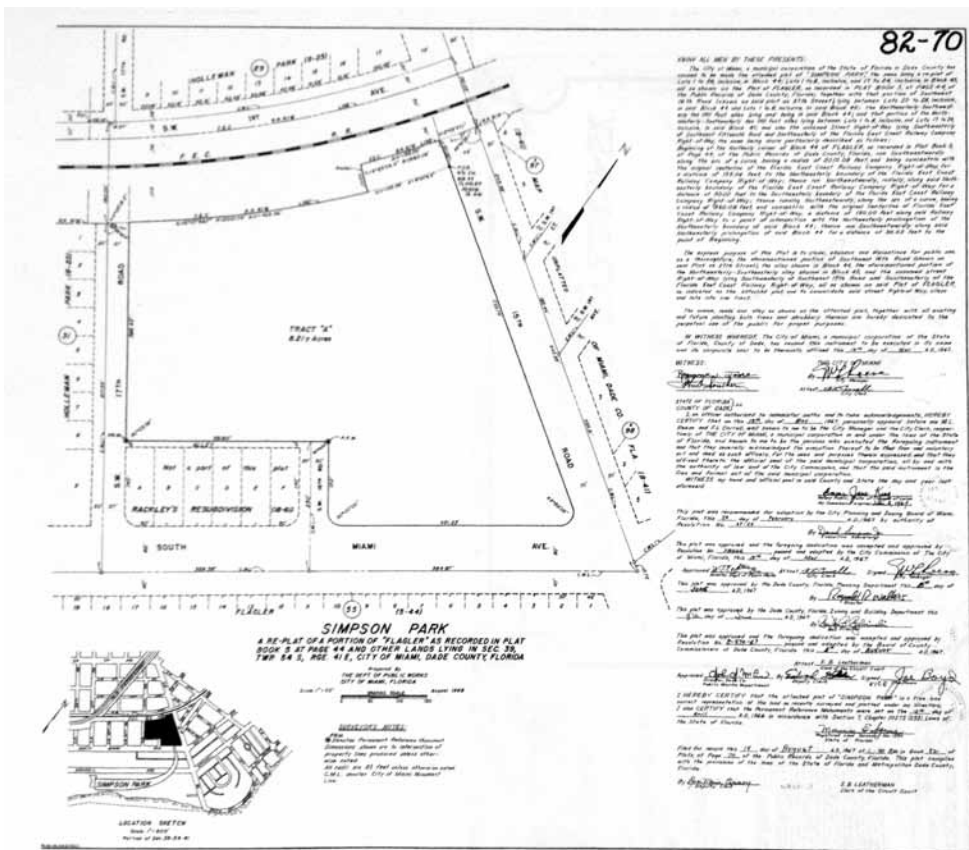
Map showing sixteen lots targetted for expansion of Simpson Park; c. 1930s
Image Source: City of Miami



Aerial of Simpson Park; 1948
Image Source: City of Miami



Aerial of Simpson Park; 1963
Image Source: City of Miami



Re-plat map of Simpson Park, showing City right-of-way incorporated into Park; 1967
Image Source: City of Miami



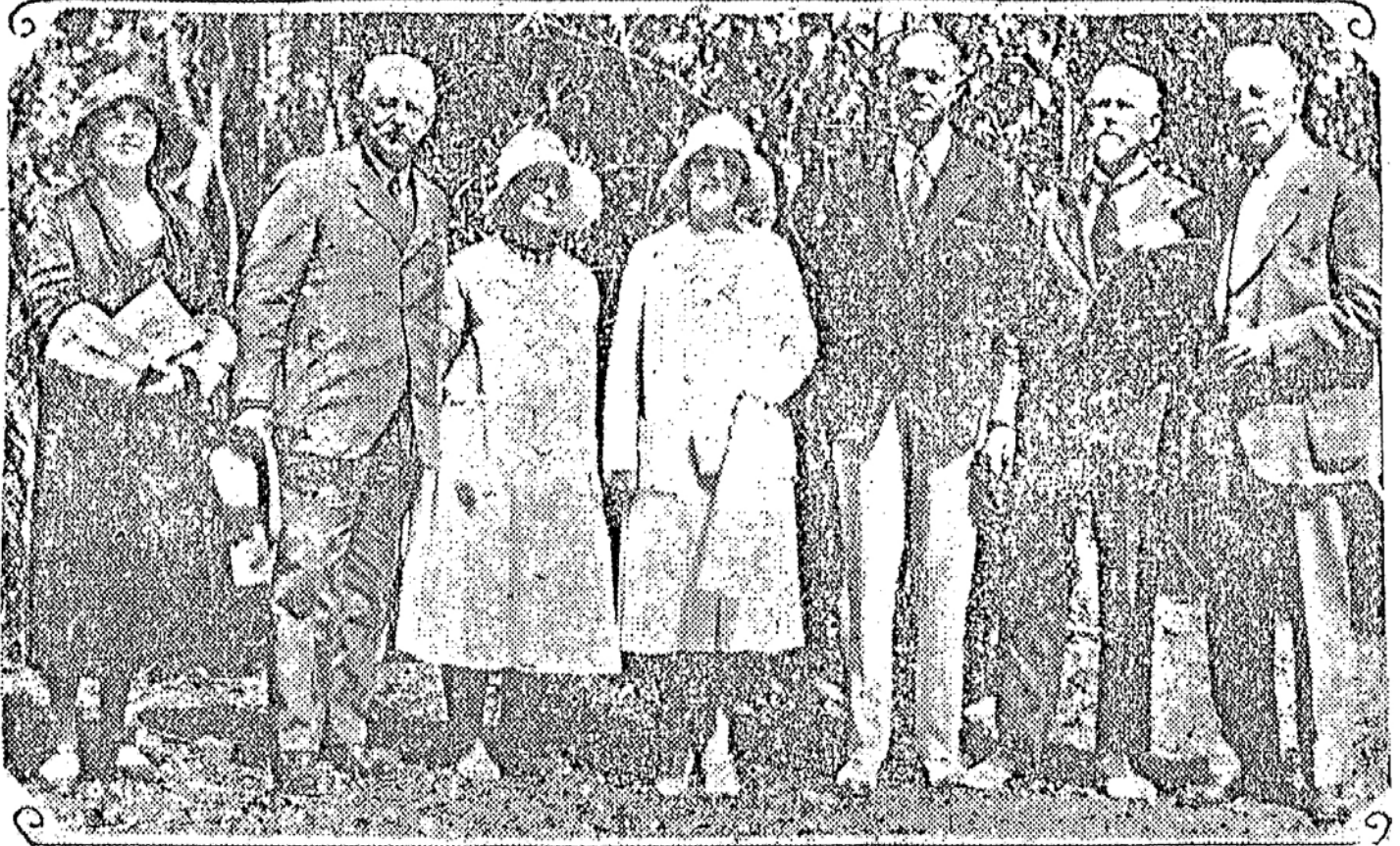


Charles Torrey Simpson reading at home at the Sentinels; c.1930
Image Source: Tequesta Journal



Charles Torrey Simpson's home at the Sentinels, with the two pine trees for which the estate was named standing guard; c. 1920s-1930s
Image Source: Tequesta Journal

NOTED NATURALIST HONORED IN PARK CELEBRATION



—Daily News photo by Willits

Dr. Charles Torrey Simpson, noted Miami naturalist, was honored today by prominent Miamians, when Jungle park, S. Miami ave. and 15th road, was dedicated and renamed Simpson park. Principal participants in the dedication ceremonies were, left to right, Mrs. M. G. Holleman, president, Holleman Park Garden club; Dr. Howard Kelly, Baltimore, noted surgeon and naturalist; Mrs. Simpson, Mrs. T. V. Moore, Mayor C. H. Reeder, Dr. Simpson and Dr. David Fairechild.

Newspaper photo of Charles Torrey Simpson and esteemed participants at the dedication of Simpson Park; 1931
Image Source: Miami Daily News

Simpson Memorial Dedication Today

Dream Come True



MRS. ST. CLAIR



MRS. MOORE

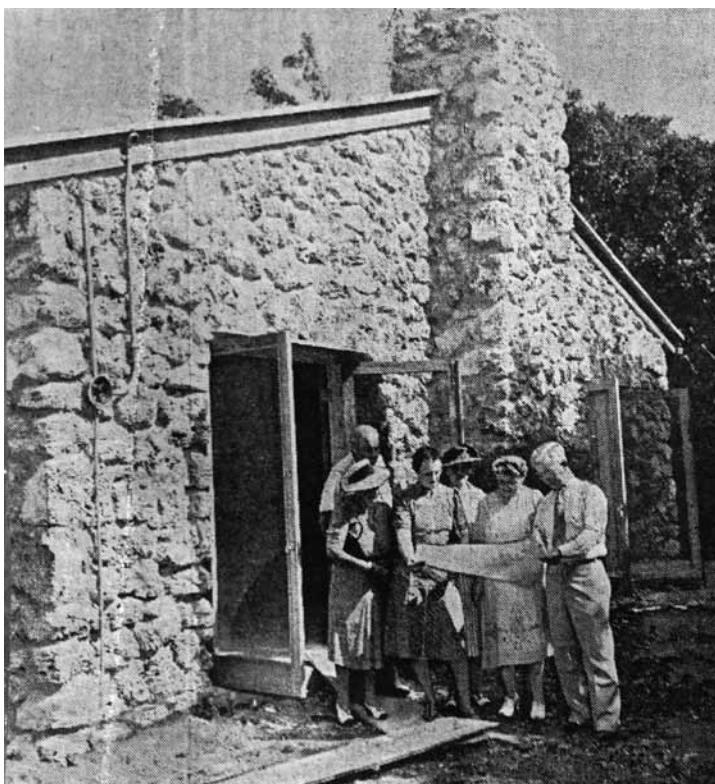


MRS. COOMBS



MRS. SANDELL

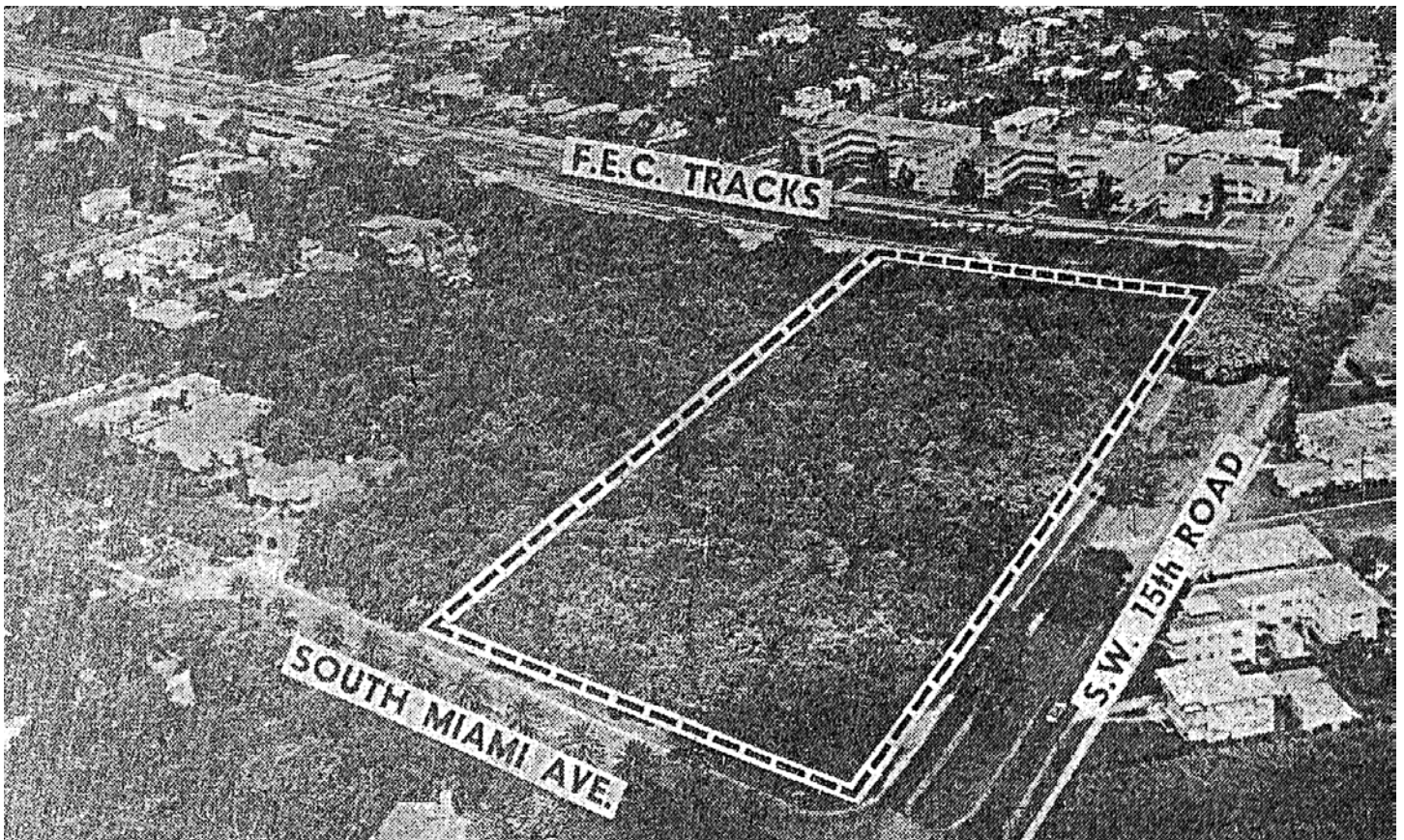
Newspaper photo of Charles Torrey Simpson Memorial Garden Center and the women who worked towards its creation; 1941
Image Source: The Miami News



Newspaper photo of client and designers of the Charles Torrey Simpson Memorial Garden Center; 1941
Image Source: The Miami News



Photo of Charles Torrey Simpson Memorial Garden Center under construction; 1941
Image Source: City of Miami



Proposed location of History Museum in Simpson Park; 1958
Image Source: Miami Herald

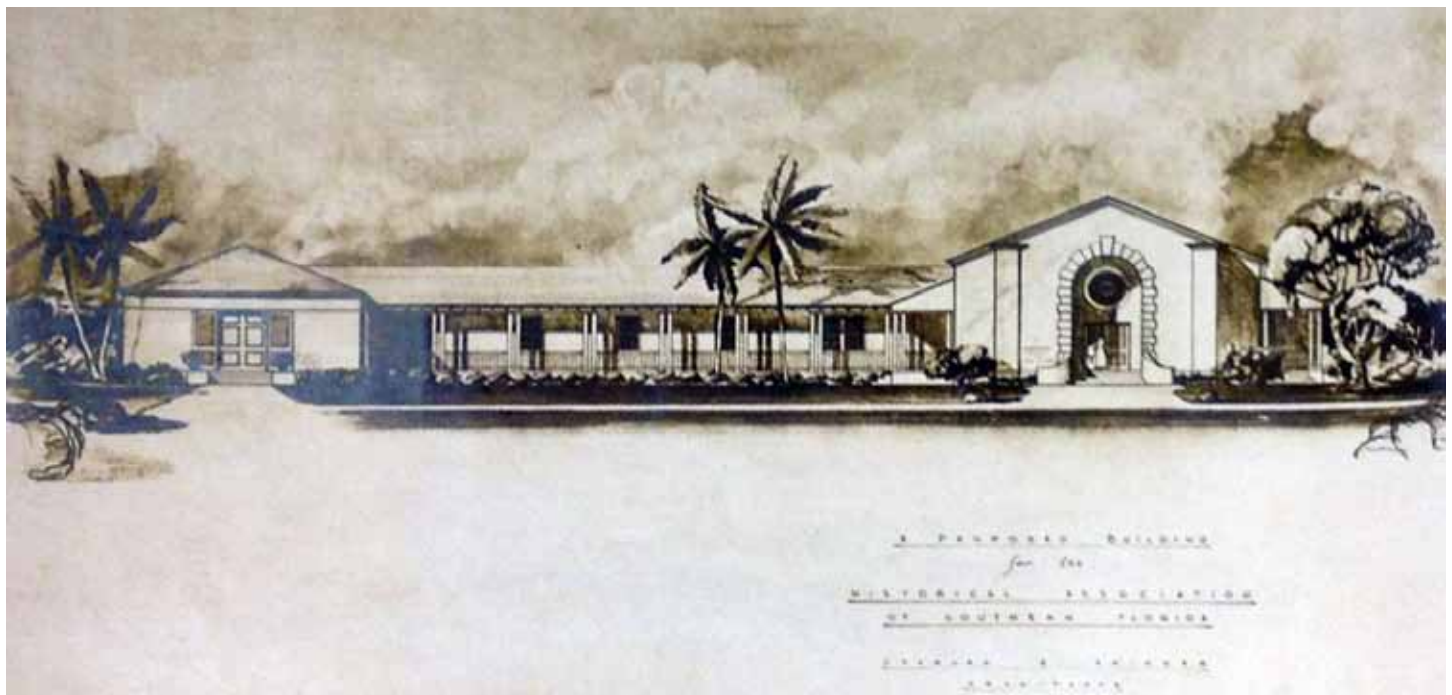
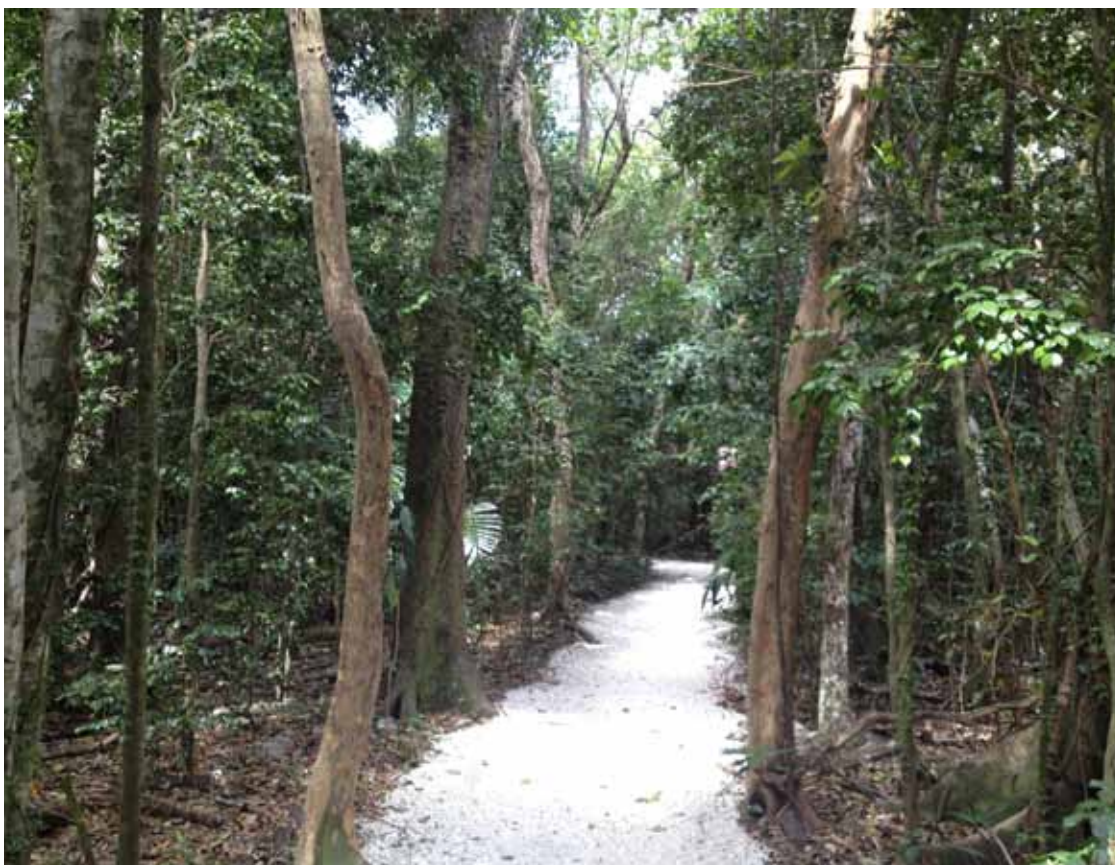


Image Source: HistoryMiami



Typical image of natural undergrowth in the park; 2014
Image Source: Author



Typical image of the walking path through the park; 2014
Image Source: Author



Pathway through the park; 2014
Image Source: Author



Falling tree over the pathway; 2014
Image Source: Author



Historic signage explaining a “Fallen Oak” that may or may not still be there; 2014
Image Source: Author



Historic signage explaining a Strangler Fig; 2014
Image Source: Author



Signage explaining a particular tree species in the park; 2014
Image Source: Author



Signage introducing Tropical Hardwood Hammock concepts; 2014
Image Source: Author



Perimeter oolitic limestone wall fronting South Miami Avenue; 2014
Image Source: Author



Perimeter oolitic limestone wall fronting Broadway (SW 15th Road); 2014
Image Source: Author



Oolitic limestone perimeter wall fronting Metrorail Right-of-Way; 2014
Image Source: Author



Oolitic limestone perimeter wall fronting SW 17th Road; 2014
Image Source: Author



Front facade of Charles Torrey Simpson Memorial Garden Center facing SW 17th Road; 2014
Image Source: Author



Front porch of Charles Torrey Simpson Memorial Garden Center; 2014
Image Source: Author



Northwest facade of Charles Torrey Simpson Memorial Garden Center; 2014
Image Source: Author

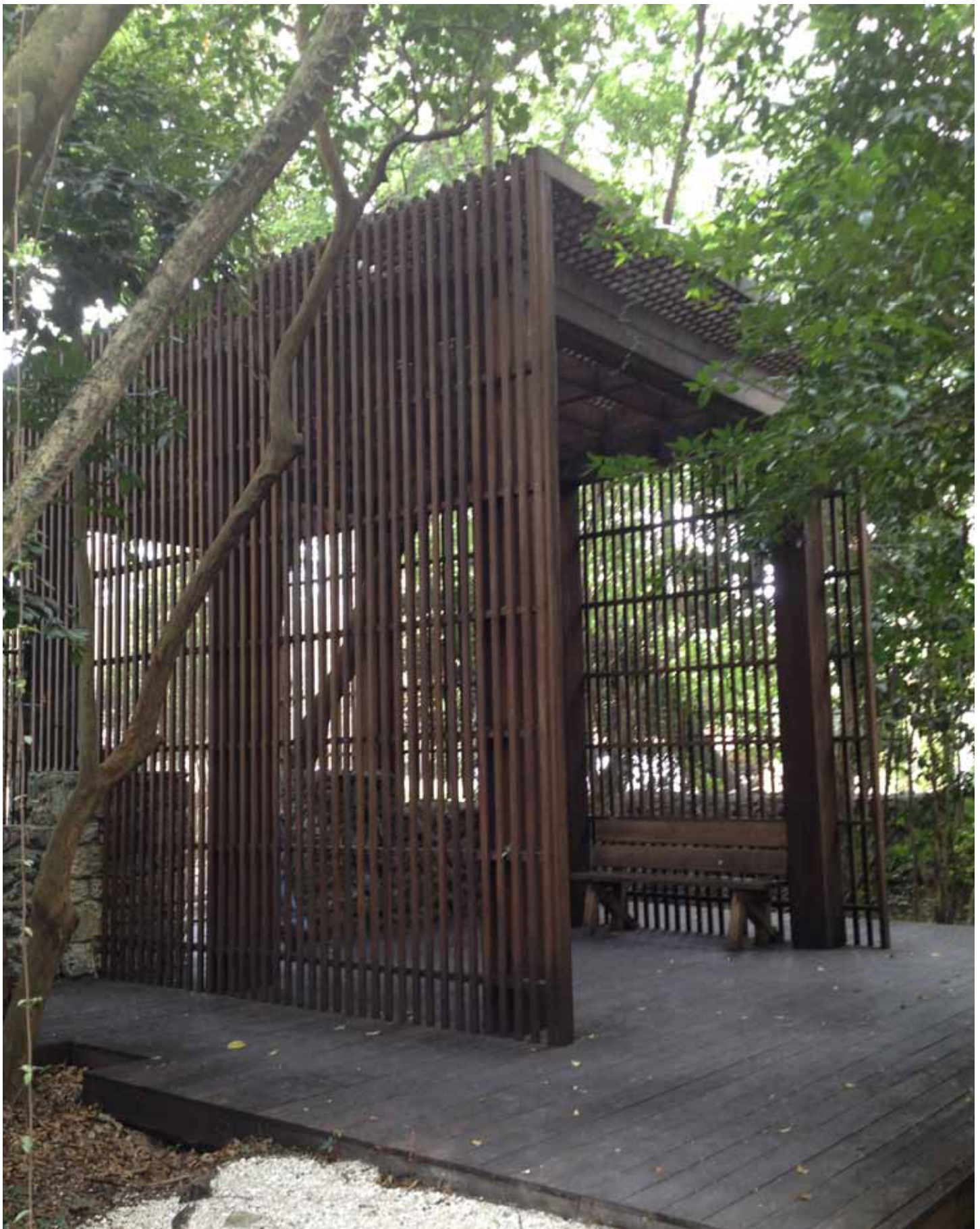


Original exterior oolitic limestone walls; 2014
Image Source: Author



Original oolitic limestone chimney and fireplace; 2014
Image Source: Author





Eastern entrance to the park; 2014
Image Source: Author



Path leading to eastern entrance to the park; 2014
Image Source: Author



Eastern entrance to the park, closed due to safety concerns; 2014
Image Source: Author



Man-made pond constructed in 1920s; drained and out of order due to broken water pump; 2014
Image Source: Author



Plaque at eastern entrance to the park; 2014
Image Source: Author